

THE HEART OF NIGHT WIND

A STORY OF THE GREAT NORTH WEST

By VINGIE E. ROE

ILLUSTRATIONS by RAY WALTERS

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CHAPTER XIV.

The Call of the Wind.

The night lay thick over the Siletz country. High above, the pine tops sang with a roar, soft-voiced but far-reaching as thunder. Mystery and loneliness pressed upon the wilderness like a finger. It quivered the sharp ears of Black Bolt pricked forward, listening. It padded the foot of Coosnah running ahead in the trail, but upon Siletz its touch was lost. She, too, was of the forest on a night like this; she, too, was free of its hidden paths. Hour after hour they threaded the familiar way, and presently the forest lightened, fell away, left them at the steep shore of the Siletz river, gurgling along in the darkness, swift and shallow.

Fields and pastures lay here upon right and left and cabins stood squat in the shadows. This was the headquarters of the reservation. Through the small settlement, up a lane and across a woods-lot went the trio, and presently Siletz drew rein where a sorry shack crouched forlornly beneath a mammoth fir. The sound brought to its door a bent figure that came and stood at Black Bolt's head like a shadow.

Siletz spoke in jargon, slid down, trailed the reins on the earth and entered the little house.

An hour later she stood against its closed door, facing a dusky circle of squatting figures, her trim form straight in the lamplight, her shirt open a bit at the throat, her slim hands eloquent in quiet gestures.

Near the pine table that held the fluted light stood old Kolawmie, a splendid illustration of the white man's ways.

He might have been fifty years of age, he might have been a hundred. Pure blood of chiefs ran in his veins, and he had memories of the time when the Oregon country reached from the northern sound to the valley of the Sacramento, but the burden of progress hung heavy on his shoulders, his fingers trembled from much devotion to the Spirit of the Burning Water.

Broken in heart and soul and tribe, he dreamed out the long last days in the monotony of the reservation, sending his sons to the red-roofed school on the hill, turning them aimlessly loose upon their lands when they were through—but still throughout the country where the sign of the Siletz was seen, there were known his wise precepts, there would his call bring followers. About him gathered now a silent circle, young men who could speak good English and write essays on the evolution of man, older ones who accepted the modern modes with reservations, and a few like himself of the ancient time.

To them Siletz was speaking. "Trouble has fallen upon the Night Wind," she said sweetly, "and she comes to her friends for help. Sandry at the camp is deserted by his men. The camp falls, the work is stopped, the engines are silent at their posts, and a big contract that means much is ready to be lost—and Hampden of the Yellow Pines laughs in glee, for he has done this thing. Men there are not in the country—and to go to Portland means loss of time on the great contract. Therefore Sandry sits with his head in his hands, thus—"

With swift art she bent her dark head forward upon her palms, drooped her slim shoulders, and instantly despair loomed before the dusky circle. "For which the heart of Siletz sickens, for she is Sandry's woman."

There was silence for a space. The girl was an artist. "She would help him. Therefore she comes to her friends, whose hearts are large with friendship, though their hands are soft with leisure. The Siletz need not work. Will they give the free gift of labor for the Night Wind's man?"

It was a heart-speech. It was in jargon and it was successful, for with the early dawn, blue-gray with mist and sun-shot with crimson, Sandry, who had not slept, standing with furrowed brows on the office step, heard sounds of hoofs at the valley's head. He looked and beheld a cavalcade of horsemen, riding with ease on their ragged ponies, and led by Siletz upon Black Bolt, who still stepped proudly after his day-and-night's journey, while Coosnah rolled with swinging ears at his side.

"Here," said the girl as she rode up, "they will work for the big contract."

And she slid down with a little sigh of weariness before Sandry could offer his arms.

"Gosh!" said Siletz to himself in the shadow of the office, "the Siwash!" "Mr. Sandry," he said to the owner when the long tables were filled in every place with the best of the vanishing tribe that Siletz could pick. "I'm kickin' myself that I didn't think of the Indians myself, though Lord knows if we can whip 'em in line, for it would take the devil himself to make a Siwash work."

But it did not take his majesty. It took only the word of Kolawmie, who had given a command which a quiet half-breed who seemed the leader of

the crew artlessly repeated to Sandry.

"We will work till the contract's saved," he said; "in giving to you we give to Siletz, who is your woman."

And Sandry, astounded beyond measure, opened his mouth and closed it without speech.

And it was work indeed for all. Sandry himself, as he had grimly threatened once, "learned how" and tended hook. Collins took Hastings' place at the reading donkey, selecting a slim, brown boy as fireman, while the foreman proved his worth a dozen times over, by being everywhere at once, by filling things down to the most rigid system, by planning, executing, finishing, with the hand and mind of an artist.

It would have been contrary to human nature if Sandry had not felt a thrill of triumph when he next ran across Hampden at Toledo.

The Yellow Pines owner grinned. "Siwash!" he said insolently. "Siwash!"

"Yes," flamed the younger man, "Siwash—but I have five million feet of logs at the mouth of my slough! I'll float my contract on time, Mr. Hampden—and then I'll look into the little matter of my East Belt."

That day he got his first letter from Poppy Ordway. It was heavy and satiny and it breathed an insidious perfume.

Also it was brilliant with excitement and hinted at great things.

"I'm certain Hampden's crooked," she wrote; "I've found a man who knows him—and he's in the commissioner's office. He's young and he's susceptible and he thinks I'm one of the 'ring'! Oh, but it's exciting. I passed him a tip—isn't that the way you men would say it?—that I had a snap in view, but that I already had

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And something in the speech silenced the man. "Sometimes," went on this clever woman, "one will take—providing there is a great enough incentive. I had a great incentive."

She ceased, waiting, and against his will Sandry supplied the question.

"What?"

"You," said Miss Ordway in a whisper. With her pretty, inimitable gesture of daring she put up a hand, laid it against his cheek and drew his face toward her.

"Boy," she said in a curiously choked tone, as if emotion dominated her, "oh, boy! With your youth and

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